

2021 HLPF from a Child & Youth Perspective

The following coverage of the first week of the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) was done Christiane, Aasritha, Shritan, Lisa, and Fathima from Nord Anglia Education who served as student rapporteurs. The student rapporteurs have been learning about the SDGs in their schools and have applied their knowledge, critical thinking, and team work to cover various sessions of the Forum.



This year's annual High Level Political Forum took place in a hybrid format from 6-15 July 2021 with the theme "Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development"

Day 1

The opening session of the Forum featured numerous dignitaries who spoke about their countries and organizations' achievements with regard to the recovery from the pandemic and the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. The speakers highlighted a range of important issues such as vaccine inequity, poverty, hunger, mental illness, setbacks to education, and socioeconomic inequalities. The pressing problems of gender inequality and climate change were also discussed at great length. Experts from the WTO, WHO, IMF and other organisations also discussed the relevance of various state and non-state departments in the fight against the pandemic and the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. Several delegates called for increased investment in robust technological, systematic, and political innovations that are aimed at achieving the SDGs. They underscored the need for more effective use of current resources to ramp up vaccine production and promote sustainable development at the same time. In addition, some speakers emphasised the need to account for marginalised communities when formulating policies. Crucially, all the dignitaries were on the same page and agreed that more interdependence is imperative in order to bridge the divide between nations and achieve the current global goals. Several speakers also asserted that the pandemic provides a unique opportunity to redesign the current system to support equity and sustainability. Most of them admitted that partnerships between governments and organisations are key in order to extricate the world from the pandemic and to ensure sustainable development. The session was a vital steppingstone that laid the foundation for the discussions during the following meetings.

The second session of the HLPF was centred around the agenda: "Ensuring that no one is left behind." Connection, transparency, accountability, and human rights were discussed throughout the session. Delegates continuously highlighted various barriers and solutions to overcome them and ensure that all parties are accounted for during our quest to achieve the 2030 agenda. For instance, some speakers asserted that fighting corruption, reallocating resources, and equitable distribution of vaccines can help tackle the issue. Panellists successfully pointed out that migrants, refugees, and other marginalised communities must be accounted for if we are to have a shot at success. As Ms. Michelle Bachelet adeptly said, "We cannot fix what we do not see." It was agreed that we must understand the core of the issue in order to try and solve it. As some speakers stated, vulnerable people need a voice. Another important point that was expressed

was that no one should be left behind when it comes to securing digital networking for everyone, especially owing to the ever-growing reliance on these technological tools on a global scale. One of the dignitaries also emphasised the importance of making people aware of government-offered support. This perspective clearly shows that awareness is key to ensuring that no one is left behind. Norway's youth delegate, Freja Ellefsen, rightly said that "We will not reach the SDGs if the most vulnerable of us are left behind."

Day 2

Let's not forget that even before the pandemic – a hundred million people were being pushed into extreme poverty each year and 10,000 people were dying each day because of health expenditures.

The speakers acknowledged the progress made in maternal and child health and immunization coverage for communicable diseases. At the same time, it was agreed that the COVID-19 pandemic, however, has halted progress in health and poses major threats beyond the disease itself. What began as a public health emergency has rapidly grown into a political, social and economic crisis of historic proportions.

Three key actions that should be a priority:

- Immediate: Covid-19 vaccine free from monopoly control – with all Covid-19 technologies transferred via the World Health Organization to ramp up supply across the world
- Secondly: There is nothing as powerful to reduce inequalities than by every country receiving publicly funded, universal healthcare.
- Third is the money: The introduction of permanent wealth taxes and corporation taxes the world over to both reduce inequality and to fund equalizing policies. Argentina's solidarity tax sets an example of what can be done.

The Commission also adopted a resolution requesting ESCAP to work with all other relevant UN entities and WHO to ensure universal access to vaccines, diagnostics and therapeutics. We have new research that shows that more unequal societies had significantly higher infection rates than more equal and inclusive societies due to lower tax rates and weaker health systems as a result; crowded housing conditions in cities that spread contagion.

Some of the actions suggested by the speakers:

In order to build resilience to shocks and crises, we need to accelerate action to sustain peacebuilding efforts and to promote people-centred justice systems and effective institutions.

We need a paradigm shift to see spending on services for children's wellbeing as an investment for an inclusive and sustainable recovery

- Promote policies and actions based on the obligations within the human rights framework
- Ensure through finance and equitable distribution vaccines for all and universal social protection for all in all countries without discrimination
- Adopt policies and support grassroots and judicial institutions that end violence against women and girls and address power imbalance and discrimination.
- Need a renewed global commitment to sustainable development through solidarity, international cooperation, and multilateralism
- Need for audits of crisis preparedness and response as well as audits of vaccine rollouts
- In the future, SAIs will have a key role to play in assessing their governments' recovery plans – also based on the principle of "leaving no one behind"

The fourth session of the UN High Level Political Forum focused on the intersectionalities of SDG 12, 13, and 17 in relation to mitigating climate change by addressing the economic, climate, and nature crisis simultaneously. The overarching message of the session was this: governments, the private sector, local communities, civil societies and global governing bodies must work together to successfully combat climate change and in turn fulfill the aforementioned SDGs. Speakers discussed issues related to the latter such as biodiversity loss and the **need for sustainable agriculture, investments on climate causes and issues** using the money gained from the recovery of economic activity after the pandemic, a better partnership between consumers and the private sector, especially in the context of **sustainable**

purchasing in the fashion industry and **denouncing cultural and social stigmas surrounding agricultural workers**. A huge emphasis was put on the importance of the COP26 Summit which will mark the **first time all signatory countries of the Paris Agreement will meet since 2015**. Environmentalists hope for the creation of **stricter and harsher environmental legislations** and full implementation of this as the Paris Agreement never progressed from adoption status. The youth play an integral role in the development of widespread awareness about the climate crisis. As Louis Mabulo, UN Young Champion of the Earth put it, “There’s opportunity for young people to be torch bearers of this knowledge and help promote a just transition towards the future of responsible production.”

Day 3

“There is one good thing about this gloom (pandemic), never have so many people felt so vulnerable at the same time, and never has **a demand for greater international cooperation been so high**. We have to use the circumstances to advance our efforts.” pointed out Mr. Guy Ryder.

The fifth session of the HLPF dealt with the **SDGs 1,2,8, and 17**, with the goals being interlinked.

Each representative shared what their country or organization has been doing, and proposed ideas that could be acted on the international platform. There were many great examples of nations creating impactful changes, but one that was willing to be adopted by most countries was that of **Finland’s aim** to work towards **providing quality, nutritious meals in schools** to ensure that more parents send their children to schools.

Almost all excellencies have agreed upon the following:

1. Need to **elevate social protection laws**.
2. Combat **malnutrition** by following Finland’s example.
3. Need for an **inclusive, multilateral system** to build a fairer world.
4. **Targeted investment policies** with special attention to gender.
5. Need for **country-based, country-driven programs** with special attention to women, children and youth. **Private sector needs to be invited to engage** in a meaningful manner.
6. A re-think of the current food system dialogue and introduction of **new food systems** that respect producers and serve the planet.
7. Governments must work and direct energies toward **developing rural areas**.

“All solutions are sustainable when they are owned by people and governments” – Ms. Gerda Verburg

The last hour of the third day centred on discussions on the need for better partnerships between the national government and local communities in ensuring the success of the SDGs. The speakers discussed a variety of topics related to the latter but they all had the same underlying message: everyone, from local communities to the highest governmental body must work together to successfully combat societal deprivations, and one way governments have been doing this is through Voluntary Local Reviews (VLR). VLRs have been a way for the national government to know which SDGs they should focus on based on the input from the local community, ensuring that each district is supported in the ways they need the most. This has been especially important during the recovery period after the pandemic as communities might not have the full attention of their national government. Mayors of cities such as Helsinki in Finland and Subang Jaya in Malaysia have already implemented VLRs in their local communities and this has proven effective. Mayor Jan Vapaavuori of Helsinki quotes “the SDG is the only system that can ensure that ending poverty and other deprivations go hand in hand with strategies that improve health, reduce inequality and spur economic growth” affirming the importance of VLRs in fulfilling the Sustainable Development Goals. VLR ensures that those from the smallest, most rural communities are given a voice in national and global discussions.

Day 4

The HLPF session on day four was focused on discussing possible medium and long-term trends related to the **recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic** in relation to the **achievement of the SDGs**. The consistent theme that was highlighted was an approach that promotes the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: building an **inclusive and effective path** for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development.

Stakeholders and Member States have shown their awareness on solving the sustainability issues with **long-term solutions that extend into future generations** and “not just the building back from our current state”. There’s a recognition for the need to deal with new technologies and how they’re going to impact the progress of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. This was addressed mainly in comments from the Norwegian and German government representatives. “People don’t like rapid change. They feel scared of that. They don’t want to live in a very insecure world.” Thus, it’s been acknowledged that it’s crucial to **help people deal with change**, especially children who are vulnerable. Likewise, workers in developing countries may lose their jobs throughout this process, but they must **feel supported and empowered** in order to continue with their lives.

The delegate of the Republic of Korea has stated that the impacts of the pandemic has accelerated the **transition to a digital and green economy**. “These changes are not only transforming the labour market; they are also exacerbating inequality in our societies.” It was decided that they must take advantage of the transition while compensating for inequality. Four points were highlighted to show how Korea is playing an active role in taking a lead in this process. These points include:

1. Increasing the productivity of all industries by investing in the integration of data, network, and Artificial Intelligence will also help strengthen education.
2. The Green New Deal strategy actively promotes carbon neutrality by forcing renewable energy and green mobility, such as electric and hydrogen vehicles.
3. The stronger Safety Net strategy protects vulnerable people by expanding employment insurance, providing digital and green job training, while also working to bridge the digital divide.
4. Public trust, openness, transparency, and participation are the key to successfully implementing these strategies.

The main message was concluded to be that the nature of change is a very complex topic. Everyone has roadmaps, visions, and ideas of how to move forward for 2030, but the challenge comes with how to bring about this change. It depends on aligning interests, engaging stakeholders, and accepting differences in order to make that change effective. The impacts of the pandemic have proven that collaboration through partnerships can result in determined and effective action. This is an opportunity for us to build back stronger by reforming, restructuring, reengaging, and realigning.